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ABSTRACT

Although it may be so subtle that it is not noticed or sudden and life altering, adult development occurs in a cycle of four inherent processes: transaction, transition, transformation, and transcendence. These processes exist in a cycle characterized by growth and development. The processes can be defined as follows: (1) transaction--personal, social, biological or a combination of internal and external elements causing a change in one's meaning perspective; (2) transition--an inner disturbance characterized by a time of reflectivity or personal reckoning in which repair and reconstruction efforts are contemplated; (3) transformation--a revision of one's belief system; and (4) transcendence--accepting the past as finished, recognizing the possibilities of building upon changes incurred, and the development of a sense of fulfillment in life. Conceptualizing the life span in terms of these four stages of development and seeing the stages as occurring in a cycle can benefit adult educators. They can better understand the patterns of change and development and can identify the efforts adult students are making to reframe their lives. Additionally, this view gives educators an existential base for understanding adults and how adults change through time. Such knowledge can help adult educators support adults' development and facilitate the integration of new learning. (Contains 21 references.) (KC)

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THE 4 T's OF ADULTHOOD DEVELOPMENT

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Human development can be so subtle or routine that it practically goes unnoticed by the individual, or it can be life-altering where one's belief system or frame of reference is revised resulting in a restructuring of one's life. This article examines the processes involved in significant adult development by concentrating on development as it impacts and affects all facets of life. There are three main areas of focus: a) a description of the processes of adult development, specifically transaction, transition, transformation, and transcendence, b) the manner in which various external and internal influences from the biological, sociological, and psychological areas can be incorporated into a concept of the developmental processes, and c) a discussion of implications for adult educators.

Related Literature

Theorists such as Erikson (1950), Loevinger (1976), Levinson (1978), Neugarten (1979) Cross (1981), Merriam and Clark (1991), and Sheehy (1995) among others, have recognized adulthood as a period of change and have sought to formulate a framework for organizing and explaining change and/or adult development. Change is typically multi-directional and does not necessarily assume growth. Development is uni-directional and assumes growth.

One of the first researchers to acknowledge that adults develop as well as children was Erikson. Each of the development stages of his framework consists of dichotomous constructs which require a resolution of inherent conflict before advancing to a

subsequent, higher-level stage. Erikson's theory spurred other age-related developmental models such as those of Loevinger (1976) and Kohlberg (1976).

Phasic cycle theorists, on the other hand, view adulthood as comprised of stages which focus on task fulfillment. Havighurst (1972) maintained that dominant concerns for each decade of life arise from physical maturation, from the pressure of cultural processes, and from desires, aspirations and values of the emerging personality. Much of Havighurst's work was the impetus for other phase theorists such as Sheehy (1976, 1995), Lowenthal (1975), and Levinson (1978).

The third school of thought concerning adult development is unlike the first two linear processes which are generalizations and are tied to ages or phases. This individualistic concept examines adult development from an inner change perspective. Mezirow's (1978) concept of perspective transformation maintains that as one's life changes it is one's meaning perspective that interprets reality. This meaning perspective, or frame of reference, emerges from interactions between the individual and environment.

It can be argued that adult development does not follow a linear progression through life. There are too many forces impacting upon this progression such as divorce, geographic mobility, career change, and family composition, to maintain that adults develop in a linear age/phase related sequence. A view which encompasses developmental processes and the biological,

social, and psychological influences on these processes acknowledges an interrelated and more thorough approach to envisioning adult development. As Tennant and Pogsdon (1995) have suggested, "we should avoid any preconceived notions about predictable and relatively stable stages or phases of development, and should focus more on the process ... (p. 94). A development perspective encompasses inherent processes: transaction, transition, transformation, and transcendence: the 4 T's of adult development. These processes exist in a cycle characterized by growth and development.

transaction: personal, social, biological or a combination of internal and external elements causing a change in one's meaning perspective

transition: an inner disturbance characterized by a time of reflectivity or personal reckoning in which repair and reconstruction efforts are contemplated

transformation: a revision of one's belief system

transcendence: accepting the past as finished, recognizing the possibilities of building upon changes incurred, and the development of a sense of fulfillment in life

A Framework For Adult Development

Figure 1 illustrates how the 4 T's are integrated into a comprehensive view of adult development. This conceptualization views the process of development as a cyclical process, and the biological, sociological, and psychological influences as forces affecting the process.

Figure 1. Adult Developmental Processes.

	Transaction	Transition	Transformation	Transcendence
Biological	interaction between tissues and organ systems effort	system degereration and/or stabilization performance	maintenance of overall physiological	overcoming body preoccupation
Sociological	social/cultural role expectations (tasks)	movement between roles	achievement of specified task(s) resulting in order	awareness acceptance of cultural contradictions
Psychological	relationship of time and antecedent variables	movement between stages or phases	stabilized altered behavior	self-actualization

Transactions

Transactions can be seen as interactions between situational events and personal characteristics that generate change. They form a basis for a plan of action and consequential behavior. Urban (1978) suggests that a transactional relationship is the exchange of influences that occur within a system. Baltes and Baltes (1990) believe that these exchanges are not only present-oriented, but contain both present and past personal and environmental influences. These conditions generate the change implicit in a transaction.

Biological transactions would include the interaction between bodily interchanges, such as the loss of bone mass in aging persons. Sociological transactions would include emphasis on the role of an individual and society. A sociological transaction occurs when a cultural expectation is realized, such as the expectation that children must become independent from their parents. Psychological transaction consists of an

antecedent agent such as the loss of a family member that acts as a catalyst in a behavior change. These forces affect the change process independently, at varied times, and with various magnitude of impact.

Transition

Bridges (1991) contends that every transition begins with an ending where one let's go of the old before beginning the new. When meaning perspectives undergo change, personal disruption occurs and a transition takes place. These transitions are non-stable times which precipitate a change in one's way of life. Schlossberg (1987) considers transitions as "events -- or non events -- that alter our roles, relationships, routines and assumptions" (p. 74). These can be anticipated, unanticipated, or nonevent transitions which are expected events that fail to occur. According to Urban (1978) the success or failure of a transition depends on variables such as, a) the characteristic of the transition itself and one's ability to cope with the disturbance created. For example, the transition may be expected or unexpected, voluntary or imposed, negative or positive, on-time or off-time, and there may be various coping mechanisms acting on the disturbance, b) a person's internal capacities and life events, such as whether the person is an optimist or pessimist, one's experiences that can be used as resources, and the individual's decision-making ability, and c) one's support system before and after the transition. A successful transition

would be characterized by a sense of disturbance in one's life and a propelling to change or develop in some way.

The biological, sociological, and psychological influences on transition is movement oriented. It is suggested by many scientists such as Birren and Fisher (1995), Winfree (1986), and Berger (1975), that bodily rhythmic processes underly biological aging. This rhythmic process results in a biological change such as the loss of bone mass resulting in weakened bones.

Sociologically, transition is seen as the movement between roles, with each role having culturally determined tasks. For example, when children leave home there is some amount of disruption that occurs at the onset of the first child's departure and continues through to the last child's absence. There is an attempt to change roles from the task of provider to an independence from this task causing some amount of disruption in one's life.

Psychologically, transition can be seen as the movement between stages of phases of life and is more goal-oriented than role-orientated. Transition is the fluctuation of emotional states that might occur between the time a child contemplates independence from parents and the actual onset of independence. This may cause a change in behavior of the parents to where they may feel a renewed sense of freedom, or a continual sense of loss.

Transformation

According to the 4 T framework, transformation is seen as a more stable process of adult development. Biologically, there is a maintenance of previously degenerative or non-stable physiological conditions. This would be apparent in a cancer patient's period of remission, or in the possibility of slowing down the physical signs of the aging process through physical exercise.

Sociologically, the transformation process would suggest the achievement of a culturally determined task resulting in order for the individual. Transformation occurs as one maintains the activities of middle age as long as possible, and then finds culturally acceptable substitutions for the activities of middle age. For example, the activities of child rearing are substituted for the activities associated with retirement, the loss of loved ones through death is replaced by adding new friends. Sociologically, transformation is the incorporation of the culturally accepted stage of life.

Psychologically, transformation is the stable, altered behavior which is the result of a personal transition. Individuals who have "lived for their children" or led sedentary lives may realize that they are unsatisfied with life and a psychological transformation can occur. A decision is made in the transformation process to do something about one's loneliness and develop the means to meet new people or change in order to overcome the loneliness.

Tarule (1980) found that transformation efforts were closely related to the formation of new structures and regaining a stable state. In his research four steps in a process of transformation were identified. The first step, diffusion, produces confusion. Since most researchers would agree that the transformed self is a stable state, Tarule's first step of diffusion is actually what the 4 T framework refers to as transition not transformation.

Taurle's second step of transformation is dissonance. Here, the person becomes aware or focuses on an aspect of meaning perspective that needs change. This step could be considered the bridge between the 4 T processes of transition and transformation. It is characterized by the ability to listen to oneself and produce internal harmony. If an individual is faced with the felt need to do something with one's life, the dissonance step is where reason would permeate.

The third step in Tarule's transformative process, differentiation, is where new learning and recent changes are applied to one's life. Integration of this step implies refinement of a new meaning perspective and the individual's process of being. It brings a sense of appreciation of the present and future and an acceptance of self and past. During this step a sense of confidence is reached, as with a decision to return to school for a particular purpose, and new direction to one's life results.

The final step, coherence, incorporates the concepts of stability, acceptance, reflection, changed form, and equilibrium.

This step is characterized by a caring attitude about one's decision and a desire to grow as a result of that decision. As a result of an individual's decision to return to school, for example, the internal questioning may be resolved and a defensive holding pattern appears that guards against further disruption while accomplishing the goal. This process however, is actually more aligned to the process of transcendence.

Transcendence

A fourth process in the adult development process helps describe how one accepts the past as finished and unfinished at the same time. Transcendence is the ability to overcome one's previous social roles and one's limited view of self. Moody (1978) explains the dimensions of transcendence as the acknowledgment of our own finite nature and death while still striving for social change. Moody uses the term transcendence to describe a "paradoxical attitude of suspended judgment about one's life" (p. 45). McClusky (1974) suggests that transcendence is the sense of fulfillment in life and the ability to rise above and beyond the limitations dictated by the aging process.

The 4 T framework also accounts for biological, sociological, and psychological transcendence in the adult development process. In each of these areas transcendence is an acceptance of the past as finished and unfinished at the same time. Whether related to previous social roles (sociological influences), body preoccupations (biological influences), or personal behavioral characteristics (psychological influences)

transcendence is a time when one discovers oneself through the disclosure of cultural, historical epochs, and other values.

Implications For Adult Educators

Conceptualizing the life span in terms of a developmental perspective can be of benefit to the adult educator in several ways. With the educator's knowledge of adult change and development, a better understanding of the patterns of change and development and their stable, and not so stable characteristics can be realized. Tarule (1980), in elaborating on this implication, states that as a result of this understanding, educators can see how "active meaning making efforts are intensified as individuals strive to reframe their views (p. 25).

Additionally, this view gives educators an existential base for understanding adults. Previously educators characterized adults from a physical, social, or psychological base of development. Seeing adults in another metaphor, that of change through a developmental process, creates a beginning point toward a more progressive, holistic, educational stance.

Another implication for adult educators is that an examination and understanding of the nature of adult development will help the educator to understand how individuals change through time. It can provide the educator with a prescription for supporting adults' development. In the transition process one issue at a time generally becomes priority for change or development. Educators can facilitate the integration of new learning for this priority which results in goal setting, career

choice decision, decision-making and value clarification techniques. The turning points, or transitions, of an individual's life can lead to some of the most teachable periods of one's life. This period has immense productivity consequences for later years. For example, transition leads to transformation which tends to be goal-oriented. As one contemplates retirement years knowledge of the inherent changes become of interest. This is an opportune time to introduce those persons to the decisions they will be compelled to make as the change from say, employment to non-employment occurs. Providing the opportunity for goal setting, value clarification, and decision-making will enable an individual to anticipate future hazards and opportunities, thereby enhancing a transcendence or achievement of a sense of fulfillment.

Summary

This article developed a framework for viewing the process of change and development in adulthood. The use of a process approach was advocated as a means for effecting an integration of factors affecting development such as the biological, sociological, and psychological influences. This perspective shows promise as a way to better understand and relate to the adult learner and commends itself to serious pursuit by specialists in adult education, higher education, and organizations working with adults such as human services.

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